

Procedure of Peasant Bands.

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and the bankrupt merchant, the scum of the towns and the scum of the country, the politician as well as the preacher, the social reformer and the social iconoclast, the man who merely wanted to improve his lot, and the man who merely wanted to fight and plunder. Thus a goodly part of the rascaldom as well as the respectability of Germany was concerned in it. Not the whole of the rascaldom indeed, for a fair portion of it was to be found among the upper classes. The rascal in this or any other age certainly does not belong exclusively to any class. He wears a lord's and even a prince's coronet, yea, a bishop's or an abbot's mitre, as well as a peasant's blouse. This being so, it is to be expected that there are ugly facts to be recorded of the Christian brotherhood all over the insurgent area. The usual *modus operandi* was for the peasants of a wide district to gather together and threaten their lukewarm or obstinate fellow-rustics into joining their band. Those who refused to go "out of brotherly love" were fined, or "marked" by means of a post driven into the ground in front of their dwelling as a sign of outlawry. The Alsatian bands requisitioned every fourth man in a village. Having chosen a leader—an innkeeper by preference, for many of these enterprises were concocted in the village inn with the help of beer and wine—they scoured the country, sacking castles, monasteries, churches, and appropriating the spoil. Discipline being difficult to maintain, in spite of "the word of God," these bands usually finished up the rough performance by getting dead drunk on the contents of the wine cellar. The record of these feats of destruction and debauchery is not edifying reading. But a state of war being proclaimed, there is nothing particularly outrageous in the burning of castles, judged by the rules of the warfare of the time. In those days burning and plundering were fair tactics, and from the tactical point of view (always having regard to the notions of the time) the peasants might reasonably conclude that it was the most certain way to disable the enemy. Moreover, the Raubritter had set them a bad example in the matter of burning and plundering, and such things as kings or their generals, nay, even high church dignitaries, ravaging a whole countryside in war time had happened as a matter of course all through the Middle